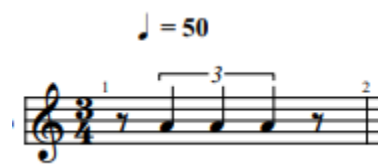


## How Konnakol Makes Difficult Rhythms Accessible

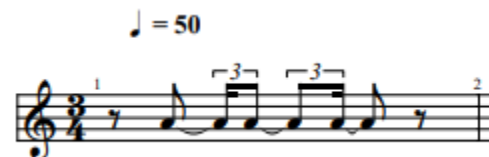
by Dennis Winge

In Adam Neely's great video "[The 'Unperformable' Rhythm](#)," the last point he makes is that the conception of any rhythm is the most important thing when it comes to playing it accurately. "The process here is the important part: breaking down rhythms into their component parts, and then understanding them in relationship to an underlying pulse." [\[6:19-6:27\]](#)

The specific rhythm he is referring to is offbeat quarter-note triplets, as in:



As Neely wisely points out, this way of notating represents the musical idea itself, but may not be very conducive to accurate performance. The following notation, Neely says, aids in accurate performance because it shows where the rhythm lies against the underlying pulse.



He also offers a third way of looking at it which could aid in actual practice of the rhythm:



Neely does an excellent job explaining the differences, and there couldn't be any better representation in standard notation. However, there is another way to conceptualize rhythms from South India called Konnakol. Very often, Konnakol helps with conceptualization in a way that standard notation cannot.

We are going to take the rhythm above as our example. Since the rhythm is triplet-based, we could break each beat into 3 (as in 1 & a 2 & a 3 & a). The syllable for 3 in Konnakol is “takida.” So it would be:

1			2			3		
ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da

But since 16<sup>th</sup> notes are involved, it’s more accurate to break each beat into 6. Now we have:

1			&			2			&			3			&		
ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da

The rhythm in question is where the bolded capital letters are:

unit	1			&			2			&			3			&		
count	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da
6-beat	x			x			x			x			x			x		
3-beat	1						2						3					
accents	ta	ki	da	<b>TA</b>	ki	da	ta	<b>KI</b>	da	ta	ki	<b>DA</b>	ta	ki	da	ta	ki	da
Neely rhythm				x				x				x						
resulting count	1			ta			2	ki				da	3					

This may look confusing on paper, because it’s meant to be spoken. When you speak it, you’ll see it can make the rhythm much easier. Follow these steps:

1. Say two “ta-ki-da” phrases for each beat, as shown on the “count” line above, very slowly out loud.
2. Tap on the “ta” of every phrase, so that you are now playing the “6-beat” line above.
3. While continuing to count out loud, leave every other tap out, so that you are now tapping the “3-beat” line above.
4. While continuing to count and tap from the previous step, say the bolded, capitalized syllables louder than the others. Remember to count very slowly, or else this step will be tricky. You definitely can do it; so if you can’t right now, it means you need to slow down even more.
5. While continuing to tap in 3, say only the accented syllables but not the others, so that you are now saying the “Neely rhythm” line while tapping the underlying pulse.
6. As you pick up speed from being gradually more comfortable with the previous steps, you will begin to hear the composite of the beats and the rhythm in question as the “resulting count” line.

The advantage of thinking of this or any rhythm in terms of Konnakol is that it is very accurate, because it doesn’t involve the usual math associated with figuring out durations of notes and rests that reading standard notation necessitates. You are counting equally spaced syllables, and then as you begin to leave out the syllables that don’t have note events, you can still ‘hear’ them, and thus can be sure that you are playing it accurately. In addition, Konnakol can help musicians dramatically improve their rhythm even if they don’t read music.

[About the author: Dennis Winge is a professional guitarist living in New York with a passion for vegan food and bhakti yoga. If you are interested in taking Guitar Instruction Danby, NY then be sure to visit his school's website.](#)